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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a series of events that occurred at Anderson College (South Carolina) as a result of conflict between a college academic policy which allowed students to withdraw from a course without penalty up until the 12th week of a 16 week semester, and a regulation of the state approval agency for veterans education which required that veterans withdrawing after mid-term be given a grade of "F". Being in a non-compliance situation with the state agency jeopardized the college's ability to offer approved programs to veterans. To change the policy would mean submission to external governmental intervention in the academic affairs of the college, and would have the effect of altering the policy for all students to satisfy the needs of the 7% of the student body comprised of veterans. Although the faculty traditionally exercised control over academic policy matters, time considerations necessitated a decision by the college president. A study was submitted to the president detailing student and faculty views on the matter of compliance, and economic and public relations considerations. The president decided that the college should defend its policies from governmental intrusion, and that any policy changes dictated by the state would affect veterans only; non-veterans were not to be penalized by any such policy alterations. (JDS)

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THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ANDERSON COLLEGE OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION ON ACADEMIC POLICY

BY

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Anderson College

A PRACTICUM PRESENTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which external forces may require modification of internal college decision-making procedures. In addition, it was the intent of this study to determine if the specific issue of the possible loss of revenue because of regulations involving veterans justified in the minds of faculty and students the direct intervention of the president of the college without following normal college decision-making procedures.

Selected faculty members and veteran students were interviewed in an attempt to determine attitudes toward alternative solutions to the problem. An economic impact study was conducted to determine the degree to which the college is dependent upon revenue generated from veteran students.

It was determined that the faculty members were generally favorable toward whatever presidential action might be in the best interest of the college. The student veterans, on the other hand, voiced strong opposition to any action by the president that might result in a policy that might be discriminatory toward them.

It was further determined that, even though the operating budget of the college is not heavily dependent upon veteran enrollment, there was a public relations factor to be examined. It was expected that, if the college were to lose its approval for veterans training, the public would view this loss of

approval as an indicator of inferior programming and/or teaching on the part of the college. This potential negative publicity created a strong demand that the college conform, if necessary, to governmental demands.

The recommendations arising from the study called for an initial stance of non-compliance to test the degree of determination on the part of the governmental agency. It was further recommended that the college make whatever changes might be necessary in order to retain veterans education approval.

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INTRODUCTION

The trend to open admissions and enrollment, coupled with liberal academic policies of some institutions of higher learning, has led to abuse of the program of educational benefits provided by the Veterans Administration (hereafter referred to as VA). One representative of the VA has estimated $394 million to be a conservative estimate of the cumulative amount of uncollected overpayments to student veterans and other eligible recipients (hereafter referred to as veterans). The United States Code (1) provides the legal framework for the VA program of educational assistance, and this Code is implemented by scores of interpretative regulations. Certain regulations (2) have been revised to provide greater guidance to State approval agencies in setting approval criteria with respect to school attendance, progress, and conduct. It is the responsibility of the State approval agencies to interpret the revised regulations and to establish minimum standards of progress for the higher education community.

When the "Standards of Progress and Conduct" were set forth by the State approving agency for veterans education in South Carolina, Anderson College found itself to be in non-compliance with the standard. Furthermore, the college was unable to meet the required guidelines through the normal decision-making procedures in time to meet the deadline set by the State approving agency. It became necessary for the president of the college to

decide whether or not to by-pass the normal decision-making procedures and establish an academic policy by decree. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to determine the extent to which external forces may require modification of internal college decision-making procedures. In addition, it was the intent of this study to determine if a specific issue involving the possible loss of revenues because of regulations involving veterans justified in the minds of faculty and students the direct intervention of the president without following normal college decision-making procedures.

This study includes an interview device that was designed to determine the probable reaction of the faculty to a presidential decree on an academic policy. It also includes an interview device that was designed to determine the reaction of veteran students toward an academic policy that might be discriminatory against them. A third part of the study was an economic impact study that was designed to determine the economic impact upon the institution of a potential loss of veteran students in the event of presidential inaction and subsequent adverse action by the governmental agency.

The findings of the study were tabulated and presented to the president of the college as resource materials.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Anderson College is a private liberal arts two-year college with an enrollment of 1200 students. Seven per cent of the

students enrolled at the college receive VA benefits. The college has a spotless record in its local administration of VA-related matters, and the administration of the college was alarmed to learn that changes in VA regulations took the appearance of governmental intervention in college academic policy.

Veterans Education (3) states that "the regulations are not to be interpreted as a directive from the VA to the school for a particular standard, but only that approval for a course requires that the school have a standard, and that it enforce it." In the same paragraph, the article states that "a student withdrawing after midterm would receive an 'F' for the course in the absence of extenuating circumstances."

At this point, in the view of the administration of the college, the VA regulations represent a significant intrusion by a governmental agency into the internal academic affairs of the colleges. It is at this point that Anderson College is not in compliance with the minimum standards of progress set forth by the State approval agency. The policy of the college is that a student may withdraw from a course without academic penalty through the end of the twelfth week of a sixteen-week semester.

There are no provisions of the law which would allow the VA to define for a school what constitutes satisfactory progress for a student (4). The approval agencies have established a broad interpretation of a statement found in the abovementioned United States Code: "Approval of courses by State approval

agencies shall be in accordance with the provisions of Chapters 34 and 35 and such other regulations and policies as the State approval agency may adopt." (5) The VA encourages this broad interpretation (6) even though this is not in keeping with the spirit of the law which limits the powers of the VA in this matter. The United States Code specifies that "No department, agency, or officer of the United States, in carrying out this chapter, shall exercise any supervision or control, whatsoever, over any State approving agency, or any educational institution." (7)

The administration of Anderson College was faced with four options, none of which seemed to be satisfactory. The first option was to refuse to alter the academic policy of the college on the matter of the last day for withdrawal from a class without academic penalty. The probable outcome of the exercise of this option was the loss of approval for veterans education. Veterans would then be unable to receive VA benefits for study at the college.

The second option was to change the policy on withdrawal for all students of the college by moving the last day for withdrawal without penalty to the middle of the semester. This would work a potential hardship on the 93% of the student body who were not veterans in order to accommodate the needs of the minority.

The third option was to change the policy on withdrawal for veterans while leaving the policy unchanged for non-veterans. This would create a situation in which veteran students would experience academic discrimination and the college would stand

in a precarious position if a veteran should bring lawsuit against the college as a result of this stance.

The fourth option was to submit to the State approval agency a document of non-compliance and then wait to see what would happen. This delaying tactic would give the administration of the college an opportunity to learn the degree of determination held by the State approval agency. This tactic would also give the administration an opportunity to convey its displeasure with the governmental intrusion in a more meaningful way to both faculty and students.

The problem had further significance to the college in terms of its implications for governance. Adams, et. al., (8) after extensive research on college decision-making systems, were able to conclude only that "a good deal more work needs to be done in studying current decision processes and information systems in colleges." Allen (9) points out that "all forms of campus government fall somewhere along a continuum from authoritarianism to participatory democracy."

The decision-making process at Anderson College may be found on the abovementioned continuum to be closer to the bureaucratic model than the participatory model, but there are many areas of shared authority. The college acknowledges the scalar view of institutional organization as defined by Stroup (10) in which all responsibility not reserved by the board of trustees rests in theory and in fact upon the president. As is true of most colleges (11) the president is the dominant

figure on campus with more power than any other person or group. Whenever a major decision must be made he stands accountable for that decision whether it is made by him personally or by some individual or group to whom authority has been delegated.

In keeping with the Standards of Accreditation of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (12) most decisions related to academic policy have been delegated to the faculty of the college. Even though the college has not witnessed the evolvement of a strong faculty bureaucracy claiming the right to control the totality of the institution, as has been the case in many institutions (13), the faculty has nonetheless become accustomed to the exercise of control over such matters as curriculum and academic policy. Members of the faculty generally have felt that this area should be left to their control.

The personal qualities of the president have influenced the types of decisions the faculty have made on many occasions, as might be expected (14), but it is the academic dean who is the man in the middle. He is the one individual who must be able to balance faculty authority with administrative efficiency. Meeth (15) points out the crucial role played by the dean as he leads and lives this paradoxical role. Anderson College has been fortunate to have had good lines of communication between the dean and the faculty as well as between the president and the faculty.

McInnes (16) has published a Statement of Rights for College Administrators. This statement is a defense of the president of

the college in his place of responsibility as the ultimate decision-maker on the campus. Mayhew (17) has gone a step farther in pointing out that "central to any workable bill of rights should be a dispersion of the myth that administrators are responsible to the faculty. Legal responsibility and accountability flow directly downward from boards of trustees to presidents and on to their chief administrative associates. Obviously, faculty members should be consulted, should provide advice, and should be involved in the decision-making apparatus. However, responsibility is another matter and this flows through legally sanctioned channels."

The governing board of the college should not be subject to undue pressures from state officials or other outside groups; furthermore, the governing board should protect the administration from similar outside pressures (18).

The persons who were in the middle of this problem were, of course, the students who were enrolled at the college. If a decision were made to change the withdrawal date for all students to mid-semester, then all students would feel themselves to be penalized. If a decision were made to change the withdrawal date for veterans only, then it is they who would feel the penalty. If a decision were made to leave the policy unchanged, the veterans would conceivably find themselves unable to attend Anderson College under the VA program. It was recognized that any decision must keep in mind the welfare of the students who stand as recipients of benefits or penalties of academic policies.

PROCEDURES

The procedures followed in this study involved interviews with selected members of the faculty and selected veteran students. There was also an economic impact study to determine the degree to which the economy of the college was dependent upon revenue generated from the enrollment of veterans.

The interviews with faculty members represented an attempt to measure their attitudes toward the decision-making process of the college with respect to academic policy in this particular situation (see interview questions in Appendix I). The faculty members who were interviewed were those who sit on the Academic Council of the college. The reasons for selecting these faculty members rather than selecting a random sample of the faculty were twofold: (a) they had already been made aware of the problem faced by the college with reference to the VA Standards of Progress and therefore did not require lengthy explanations of the problem, and (b) the Academic Council serves as a screening committee on matters of curriculum and academic policy. Most matters related to academic policy reach the faculty by way of this group.

The interviews with veterans represented an attempt to measure their awareness of and reactions to the VA Standards of Progress, and the implications of this problem for them as students of the college (see interview questions in Appendix II). Ten veteran students were interviewed. Their selection was by chance encounter on the campus over a period of

several days. These interviews took place as the writer met students whom he recognized to be recipients of VA benefits. Interviews took place in the canteen, the gymnasium, the hall of a classroom building, in the parking lot, and in the writer's office.

The economic impact study was an attempt to determine the amount of revenue generated for the college from tuition, room, and board from veterans enrolled in the spring semester, 1976. This revenue was viewed within the context of the institutional operating budget. The findings then served as the basis for a projection of revenues to be collected or lost in the academic year 1976-77, and the impact upon the college budget was outlined. The projection took into account a predicted drop in veteran enrollment after June, 1976, as a result of the expiration of benefits available for those veterans who were discharged from service ten or more years ago.

The findings of the three parts of the study were tabulated and presented to the president of the college as resource material.

It was assumed that the faculty members and the veterans who were interviewed were representative of their respective groups and that the findings were similar to those that would have resulted from interviews with others from these groups.

A limitation upon the selection of veterans who were interviewed was that the writer does not immediately recognize all veteran students upon sight. It is estimated that he would have recognized 75% of the veterans upon sight.

A second procedural limitation surfaced in the economic impact study when the writer, unable to study the institutional budget (which is not readily available to level 3 administrators), was forced to glean data from an interview with the business administrator of the college. It is assumed that the verbal communication of data was effective and that the resulting findings are accurate.

RESULTS

Seven of the eight faculty members who sit on the Academic Council were interviewed (see Faculty Interview Questions in the Appendix). Five of the seven expressed no objection to an administrative change in academic policy if such change is needed; two expressed mild objection; none expressed strong objection.

Three of the seven felt that the last date for withdrawal without penalty should be moved to mid-semester for all students in order to bring the college into compliance with the Standards of Progress regulation; only two of the seven felt that the date should be left unchanged for non-veterans and moved to mid-semester for veterans. The remaining two felt that the date should be left unchanged for all students. They felt that the college should risk losing veteran students if necessary in order to retain institutional integrity.

Four of the seven faculty members felt that their answers were representative of the feelings that would be expressed by the entire faculty upon their being informed of the new VA

Standards of Progress. Three of the seven admitted that they did not expect to find much agreement on the matter among faculty members.

None of the ten veterans who were interviewed (see Veteran Interview Questions in the Appendix) were aware of the Standards of Progress prior to the interview. There was a unanimous display of resentment on the part of the veterans when they were told of the changes in the regulations.

None of the ten veterans were in favor of an academic policy change that would be discriminatory toward them. Eight of the ten felt that the administration should make the necessary policy change provided it covered all students. Two of the ten felt that the college should run the risk of losing approval for veterans training by fighting the governmental agency.

When asked where they would attend college next year if Anderson College were to lose approval for veterans training, only one of the ten said he would return to Anderson College. Six others did not know where they would go, if anywhere.

The economic impact study revealed that approximately 3.2% of the budgeted anticipated income from tuition, room, and board for the 1976-77 fiscal year is anticipated from veteran students.

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The faculty interviews revealed no strong feelings for or against an administrative decision on this particular area of academic policy under the given circumstances. It follows that

the faculty would probably accept without serious objection whatever decision might be made by the administration in this particular matter. Faculty reactions were therefore considered to be a problem of minor consequence.

On the other hand, the student interviews revealed some exceptionally strong feelings on the part of the veterans. While their strongest reaction was one of anger toward the governmental agency, the most relevant reaction to the study was that of strong opposition to any change of policy that would place the veteran in a less favorable position academically than the non-veteran. Student reaction to academic change was therefore considered to be potentially a problem of significant consequence.

The economic impact study revealed that the college is minimally dependent upon revenue generated from veterans. The loss of such revenue would not be an economic disaster due to the relatively small percentage of veterans in the student body and due to the fact that many of the veterans are part-time students.

An additional factor arose during the study, namely, the public relations factor. In considering the implications to the college of the loss of approval for veterans training, it was felt that public relations would be a significant factor. It was felt that the public would equate such loss of approval to program inferiority, and it would be difficult to communicate to the public the true reason for such loss of approval.

The following recommendation was submitted to the president of the college:

> It is recommended that the college look with alarm upon governmental control of such internal matters of the college as academic regulations and policy-making. It is recognized that there have been gross abuses of VA benefits at some institutions, but these are a small number of institutions. The VA has chosen to censure the entire academic community for the abuses perpetuated by a few. Anderson College has a spotless record in the administration of VA benefits to student veterans.
>
> It should be noted that VA benefits represent a form of financial aid administered alongside, but not through, the college. The VA could easily justify a set of standards to be required of veterans if these standards and the decisions related thereto were administered totally by VA on the basis of reports (such as grade reports or transcripts) submitted by the colleges. Decisions related to discontinuance of VA benefits would then be made by the administrator of the benefits and not by the educational institution.
>
> The Standards of Progress regulations were developed without input from the colleges and universities. Governmental agencies continue to turn a deaf ear toward the pleas of the academic community for a voice in the formulation of regulations that vitally concern the internal affairs of the campus.

It is recommended that Anderson College submit its proposed standards of progress to the State approving agency without significant change from presently established academic policy. The academic policies of Anderson College will probably be found to be acceptable in most areas -- hopefully all areas -- except that of the last date for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty.

It is further recommended that Anderson College be prepared to defend its policy from governmental intrusion in every possible way. If it is determined that the college will lose its approval for veterans education unless it submits to governmental demands for academic policy change, it will then probably become necessary to submit to such change. It would not appear to be in the best interest of the college or of the students for the approval to be withdrawn.

If policy change becomes necessary, it is recommended that the last date for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty be changed to mid-semester for all students. A discriminatory policy opens a pandora's box of problems including student morale, record-keeping, and potential court litigation.

The president of the college accepted the above recommendations and instructed that they be followed with one modification. The modification was with regard to the policy change for all students. His directive was that any policy changes that might be dictated by VA should be made for veterans only. Non-veterans must not be penalized by such changes.

APPENDIX I

FACULTY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What would be your reaction if the administration of the college were to establish a new academic policy for the purpose of meeting the VA Standards of Progress?
   (1) No objection
   (2) Mild objection
   (3) Strong objection

2. Do you think the last date for withdrawal from class without penalty should be moved to mid-semester for all students?
   (1) Yes
   (2) No

3. Do you think the last date for withdrawal without penalty should be moved to mid-semester for veterans and left unchanged for other students?
   (1) Yes
   (2) No

4. Given the fact that we have approximately 100 veterans enrolled this semester, do you think the college can afford to risk losing this students by not meeting the minimum standards of progress?
   (1) Yes
   (2) No

5. Do you feel that the majority of the faculty members of the college would agree with your answers to these questions?
   (1) Yes
   (2) No

APPENDIX II

VETERAN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Are you aware, through reading or other media, of the new Standards of Progress that will be required of veteran students in college?
   (1) Yes
   (2) No

2. The Standards of Progress specify that a student who withdraws from a course after mid-semester must receive a grade of F for that course. This requirements holds true for all colleges in the state. In view of the fact that Anderson College students have the opportunity to withdraw much later in the semester without academic penalty, do you think the college should change the last date for withdrawal to mid-semester for all students?
   (1) Yes
   (2) No

3. Do you think the college should change the last date for withdrawal without penalty to mid-semester for veterans and leave it as is for non-veterans?
   (1) Yes
   (2) No

4. Do you think Anderson College should leave the last date for withdrawal without penalty as it now is and run the risk of losing approval for veterans education?
   (1) Yes
   (2) No

5. If Anderson College should elect not to change its academic policy on withdrawal, and if as a result, the college should lose its approval for veteran education, where would you go to school next year? _____

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